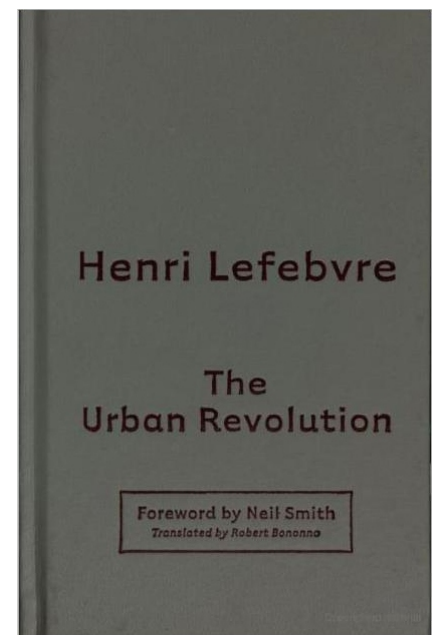


The Urban Revolution.

Foreword by Neil Smith.

Translated by Robert Bononno.



About the author

Henri Lefebvre (1901- 1991) was one of the most significant French Marxist , sociologist and European Intellectuals of the twentieth century. His many books include *The Production of Space* (1991), *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1994), *Introduction to Modernity* (1995), and *Writings on Cities* (1995). Translator of Karl Marx, pursued a line of thinking based on a humanistic Marxism for Lefebvre, the works of Marx transcends modern social sciences because it addresses the social reality in a comprehensive manner, historical, economic, political and sociological. His journalistic activity in various publications on the left revealed as a young Marxist philosopher, with great influence on the French thought of his generation. During his long career, his work has influenced the development not only of philosophy but also of sociology, geography, political science and literary criticism. For decades marxists, sociologists and others in the social sciences and philosophy ignored him, not mainly because most of his writing remained un-translated but because he could not be easily classified within the existing disciplinary predispositions. And he suffered a paradoxical fate: during the Cold War era as a Marxist he was excluded from mainstream commentary in the US by an academic establishment that was incapable of distinguishing between dogma and creativity. When his writing was appropriated at all it had to fit narrowly into the conventions of the disciplines and as a result he was classified most comfortably as a sociologist, a designation that inevitably distorted the substance of his work. The texts of Lefebvre, translated into many languages, have given greater visibility outside France than in his native country. In the United States, postmodern thinking has used its analysis of modernity and everyday life.

Author's Influence

May, 1968 a revolt was in a thousand legends and traditions. It was a political failure for the protestors, but it had an enormous social impact. The year 1968 marked a moment when students across the globe, in cities such as Paris, Berkeley, New York, Prague, Berlin, London, Rome and Warsaw, demanded profound transformations in the conception of social relations and transformed the city into a theater of social and political upheaval. Lefebvre was undoubtedly influenced by the revolutionary socio-political movements of his time, and particularly by the student movement in Paris, known as Mai 68. Lefebvre's original conception of *La révolution urbaine* Paris should be understood in its particular historical context.

English Translation of *La révolution urbaine* Paris, in French (1970). It is impossible to read this book without the hang of those times (the “revolution” of May 1968) and for those who are unfamiliar or new to this subject can find the foreword by Neil Smith. Cities are spaces that are sites of both economic production and social reproduction. Urban society is not only a physical space where people meet process, it is also an intellectual space where numerous disciplines meet. Both the urban as a particular space and urbanization as a process of socio-economic transformation have been one of the primary motivators for the creation of sociology.

Lefebvre begins with the premise that the total urbanization of society is an inevitable process that demands of its critics new interpretive and perceptual approaches that recognize the urban as a complex field of inquiry. Dismissive of cold, modernist visions of the city, particularly those embodied by rationalist architects and urban planners like Le Corbusier, Lefebvre instead articulates the lived experiences of individual inhabitants of the city. In contrast to the ideology of urbanism and its reliance on commodification and bureaucratization-the capitalist logic of market and state-Lefebvre conceives of an urban utopia characterized by self-determination, individual creativity, and authentic social relationships. A brilliantly conceived and theoretically rigorous investigation into the realities and possibilities of urban space, *The Urban Revolution* remains an essential analysis of and guide to the nature of the city.

For the better understanding of the highly complicated book short description of the following terms is very essential

From the city to the urban society

Lefebvre's use of these concepts aren't very clear to me. He traces the changes in agricultural, industrial and urban societies in part through the changes that occur with space and our perception of it; the evil and misguided urban planners and architects play an important role in its current misuse. Pages 73-74 provides a discussion of space and time-space that I don't completely grasp:

“The relation between time and space that confers absolute priority to space is in fact a social relationship inherent in society in which a certain form of rationality governing duration predominates. This reduces, and can even destroy, temporality.”

Another issue with space appears on page 182 as he speculates on the reasons for the passivity of urban inhabitants:

“...concrete space has been replaced with abstract space. Concrete space is the space of habiting: gestures and paths, bodies and memory...”. Architectural and urbanist thought fail to allow for habiting in the process of abstracting, of design and planning “from above and afar.”

The urban phenomenon

The current and burgeoning state of society/being. Since the urban hasn't been realized, and society is still entrenched in a rational-industrial, fragmented way of understanding, we cannot know what the realization will become. Urban is not the city alone, nor an enclosed system or mode, but a path or changing process:

“Piles of objects and products in the warehouses, mounds of fruit in the marketplace, crowds, pedestrians, goods of various kinds, juxtaposed, superimposed, accumulated this is what makes the urban.”

“What does the city create? Nothing. It centralizes creation. And yet it creates everything... The city creates a situation, the urban situation, where different things occur one after another and do not exist separately but according to their differences.”

Its rise from agrarian/industrial society and existence alongside it create both its current state and the problems we have in conceiving it correctly:

“As a form, the urban transforms what it brings together (concentrates). It consciously creates difference where no awareness of difference existed: what was only distinct, what was once attached to particularities in the field. It consolidates everything, including determinisms, heterogeneous materials and contents, prior order and disorder, conflict, preexisting communications and forms of communication. As a transforming form, the urban destructures and restructures its elements: the messages and codes that arise in the industrial and agrarian domains.”

Blind field

We are not able to see the reality of something due to blind fields outmoded ways of understanding and entrenched ways of thinking that block a true or simply alternate perception. “We focus attentively on the new field, the urban, but we see it with eyes, with concepts, that were shaped by the practices and theories of industrialization, with a fragmentary analytic tool that was designed during the industrial period and is therefore reductive of the emerging reality.” Blind fields involve more than just an inability to see or grasp something and the eventual illumination of the obscured area, but also warrant an examination of the possible reasons for the occlusion.

Urban form

The “urban revolution,” according to Lefebvre, results from a long historical process through which world society has evolved from an agricultural, to an industrial, and now to an urban mode of organization. To this historical process, a geographical process is superimposed, whereby around the 14th century, the city, as a geographical space, changed (in Europe) from bearing an essentially political function (the capital, the agora, the polis) to a mercantile function (symbolized by the central marketplace). During the 19th century, the city undergoes another transformation towards an essentially industrial function as the center of mass production and consumption. The current period constitutes, for Lefebvre, a “critical phase” of globalization. The urban mode of production, its imaginary, and its language is reaching out to the entire world. The ensuing “urban society” constitutes a new ontology of the world, not only because most people live in cities and because the city fabric is taking up more and more land, but mostly because we see the world differently. We live in an urban world because our language, our concepts, and our benchmarks are urban more than industrial or agricultural.

‘Urban revolution’ or ‘urban involution’?

More than 30 years after the publication of *La révolution urbaine*, Lefebvre’s optimism towards the complete urbanization of the world, which he saw was interpreted by some as an avant-garde sign of postmodernism. The hope was that the ‘urban revolution’ would lead to a better world. To the contrary, this global competitive logic is tightly related to massive normalization, homogenization, and exclusion practices.